

**Sheriff Brad Coe**  
Kinney County, Texas

My name is Brad Coe and I am the Sheriff of Kinney County Texas. I am currently in my second term as Sheriff. Prior to being elected as sheriff, I spent over 30 years with the US Border Patrol, all of which was in Kinney County.

Kinney County Texas lies in southwest Texas and has 16 miles of border with Mexico. Kinney County is roughly 1370 square miles, making 27<sup>th</sup> in size. Currently the population is under 3200 people. Kinney County is primarily agricultural land for the raising of sheep, goats and cattle. One of the primary sources of revenue is the hunting industry.

My office has 6 fulltime deputies and 8 parttime to cover the 1370 square miles of the county. This causes large areas of the county to go unpatrolled. The majority of their patrol areas are within the city limits of Brackettville and Fort Clark Springs, which is a gated community within the county.

Currently Kinney County is under siege by illegal immigrants either walking through local ranches, or being smuggled through the county on the back roads that circumvent US Border Patrol Checkpoints. I am here today to discuss the impact this immigration crisis is having on Kinney County's resources and revenue.

### Out of Control Immigration

With the current "open door" policy, Kinney County has seen a dramatic increase in illegal alien activity. The number of migrants seen on our game camera system is currently averaging 165 people per night (60,225 this year). These are also considered a way since Kinney County does not have the personnel or equipment to actively pursue these subjects.

Damage to fences, water troughs and structures has ranchers spending more on repairs than they can afford. There currently is no way to recoup those losses. The loss of the ability to grow crops is an issue also. With large groups walking cross country, creates trails that prevent the grass and natural foliage to grow, reduces the grass for the livestock.

Our "game ranches" specialize in exotic animal hunts year-round. Some of these hunts cost up to \$40,000.00 per animal. With the constant foot traffic walking through these ranches, the animals are harder to locate and often are spooked by illegal aliens while the hunter is watching the animals. Which can and will result in the loss of revenue for the rancher.

## Smuggling

Kinney County has 6 highways that lead directly from the border area into the county, plus two other roadways that circumvent the US Border Patrol checkpoint on U.S. Highway 90. These highways have seen an unprecedented increase in human smuggling activity. For calendar year 2022, Kinney County Deputies arrested 741 human smugglers and filed over 3000 felony charges. This is a huge increase from calendar year 2021 in which we arrested 169 human smugglers. Currently we are on track to exceed over 900 human smugglers for calendar year 2023.

With the increase in human smuggling comes the increase in vehicle pursuits and bail outs. The number of pursuits has increased with the increase in human smuggling arrests. With these increases, the risk of traffic accident and deaths associated to these accidents also increase.

With the increase in pursuits that result in traffic accidents puts a huge strain on our first responders. In December of 2022 an accident that was the result of a driver trying to flee from law enforcement, lost control of the vehicle, killing himself and two others, later identified as being in the US illegally, and required 3 others, who were thrown from the vehicle, to be transported to area hospitals due to severe injuries.

## First Responder Resources

Kinney County only has one EMS team on duty at any given time. Our Fire and Rescue Department is all volunteer. This accident required Kinney County to request EMS assistance from neighboring Val Verde County. As a precaution, Air-Life was also dispatched in the event they would be needed. This accident tied up all of Kinney County's first responder resources. Resources that are provided for by tax payers of Kinney County. Kinney County does not have a tax base that sustains this type of emergency. Not only were our first responders tied up, but resources from Val Verde County were tied up as well.

It's not uncommon for EMS to be called out for illegal aliens who have suffered an injury or have become dehydrated while walking cross country. Often EMS has to transport these individuals to Val Verde County since Kinney County does not have an emergency medical facility. This too ties up a county resource. Often the county does not get reimbursed for these services, creating another burden for the local taxpayer.

During one instance where EMS was tied up with injured illegal aliens, a resident of Kinney County suffered a heart attack. A second team had to be called in to respond to the call. The Kinney County resident didn't survive. Would he have survived if the primary on duty EMS team responded? We'll never know.

## Closing

Kinney County has no industry to support it. We depend on our ranchers and hunters. We have no port of entry for international trade, or tourism. At one time Kinney County was a world leader in the production of wool and mohair. That has gone away. Kinney County was the Movie Capital of Texas. John Wayne's The Alamo, Lonesome Dove, The Gambler, Bad Girls,

Just name a few that were filmed here. Alamo Village was huge tourist attraction, which brought in people from across the county. That has closed. All we have left is our agriculture and hunters. If our ranchers sell due to loss of revenue, who's going to buy the property? If the hunters quit coming, our gas station, our grocery store, and restaurants are going to close. What happens to the residents of Kinney County when the ranchers go out of business and the hunting quit coming? This is why I am fighting so hard, so I don't lose the county.

**Testimony of Chris Cabrera  
On behalf of the  
National Border Patrol Council**

**Background**

Chairman Green and Ranking Member Thompson, thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify on behalf of the National Border Patrol Council (NBPC).

The NBPC represents the interests of 16,000 front line Agents at the Border Patrol and my name is Chris Cabrera. I joined the Border Patrol in 2003, after serving 4 years in the U.S. Army as a paratrooper. I have spent my entire Border Patrol career here in the Rio Grande Valley Sector of Texas.

In FY 2022 the Border Patrol made an unprecedented 2.2 million apprehensions. This figure is approximately 5 times the number of apprehensions made in the last year of the Trump Administration and a clear sign of how the border policies of the Biden Administration are failing.

Approximately half of the individuals we arrested last year were expelled under Title 42. As you know, this authority will cease to exist after May of this year. What happened to the other million that were not expelled? The vast majority were released into this country under either a Notice to Appear (NTA) or paroled.

In addition to the apprehensions we made, there were well over 1.2 million confirmed illegal immigrants that evaded capture in the last two years. They got away simply because we did not have enough agents to apprehend them. To put this in perspective, right now we are in the Rio Grande Valley which has a population is 1.3 million people. We had almost the entire population of this portion of South Texas walk right into this country illegally because we lacked the manpower to stop them. If that is not the definition of a problem, I don't know what is.

**Issues**

If we are going to address the chaos on the border, we need two things. First and foremost, we must end catch and release. Winston Churchill once famously said Americans always do the right thing, only after they have tried everything else. When it comes to catch and release, I feel like Winston Churchill was right. The first time I testified before Congress was before the Senate Homeland Security Committee in 2015. I told the Senate then and I will tell you today, as long as we continue to release illegal immigrants into this country, they will continue to come. It is that simple.

Ending catch and release not only makes common sense – it is also the law. Section 235(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act requires Homeland Security to detain all migrants apprehended entering illegally. Homeland Security may, I emphasize may, parole individuals on a case-by-case basis for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit. That is not

what the Biden Administration has been doing the past two years and a federal judge just vacated the Administration's parole policy which is just catch and release by a different name.

The second issue is Congress's responsibility, and you need to resource Border Patrol to accomplish our mission of securing the border. Border Patrol staffing currently hovers around 19,300 agents and Tucson Sector Chief Joe Modlin testified in February before the House Oversight Committee that Border Patrol needs at least 22,000 agents to deal with the current crisis.

Increasing net manpower by 2,700 agents is going to take a tremendous effort that will require us to do two things simultaneously. First, we need to keep the agents we already have and recruit more agents. Sounds simple, but we have a problem. Border Patrol's attrition rate is currently 6.9 percent which is 72 percent higher than the Office of Field Operations. Worse news is that our attrition rate is expected to climb to over 9 percent by 2028.

The primary reason we cannot recruit and retain agents is that we lack pay parity with other federal law enforcement. I have spent most of my adult life protecting this country – first in the Army and for the last 20 years with Border Patrol. I love my job, and as I often tell my wife, you don't join the military or Border Patrol to get rich. However, I would make about \$15,000 more per year if I left Border Patrol. For many agents with young families the extra money and better work-life balance these other agencies offer makes the decision for them.

Let me be blunt, if we continue to hemorrhage personnel there is no way we will secure the border. We have spent billions on fencing, aircraft, and technology over the course of my career. All of these investments are important - and I want to thank you for it. However, we have not sufficiently invested in our agents, which are the most important element in border security.

Last Congress Senators Portman, Sinema, and Lankford introduced S. 4775 which has a provision, section 4, to address our recruitment and retention issues. I know the Committee is working on comprehensive legislation to address the crisis. I appreciate your efforts and the fact you came all the way down here to have this hearing to learn what we need. Now that you know what we need, I respectfully ask that you take action and that action must include addressing our recruitment and retention issues.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I will happily answer any questions you might have.

**Colonel Steven C. McCraw**  
Director of the Texas Department of Public Safety  
Committee on Homeland Security  
March 15, 2023

Good morning, Chairman Green, and members of the Committee on Homeland Security. My name is Steven McCraw; I am the Director of the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) and our mission is to protect and serve Texas. Thank you for travelling to the border region of our state to talk to our citizens, community leaders and members of local law enforcement who possess firsthand knowledge about the ongoing border crisis.

It is our assessment that the most significant public safety and homeland security threat to Texas and the nation is an unsecured international border with Mexico. I have testified on this issue before Congressional committees eleven times since becoming the Director of DPS, and each report has been grimmer than the last. Unfortunately, that trend continues today and the reason is simple: The federal government has failed to do its Constitutional duty and secure the border. This failure comes at the detriment of our citizens and the benefit of the Mexican Cartels.

In my 2018 Congressional testimony I stated that crime was increasingly transitory, transnational, organized, and discreet. I reported that terrorism had become more disaggregated, and that an unsecured international border with Mexico represented a grave national security vulnerability. Our southern border was porous back then. Our southern border is porous now. This provides the Mexican Cartels a reliable means to smuggle people, some of whom are members of transnational gangs, criminal aliens or foreign nationals from countries hostile toward America.

I also testified that the Mexican Cartels have exploited the porous U.S./Mexico border to dominate our nation's lucrative illicit drug market, working closely with transnational and U.S.-based gangs to support their criminal operations on both sides of the U.S./Mexico Border, and they provide a readily available retail distribution chain for their drugs.

At the 2018 Congressional hearing, we warned that if Texas were to see a repeat of what occurred in 2014, U.S. Border Patrol agents will again be overwhelmed with detaining, transporting, and processing large numbers of individuals through federal immigration procedures. A surge of unaccompanied children and family units into Texas resulted in over 300,000 apprehensions of illegal migrants for calendar year 2014. These large numbers overwhelmed the U.S. Border Patrol and Texas communities. We witnessed how a scenario in which droves of individuals seeking asylum at the U.S./Mexico border resulted in substantial security gaps along the border.

In 2018, policymakers were more concerned about the possibility of a mass migration event at our border as a consequence of a failed state in the Western Hemisphere or a catastrophic event. Nobody considered that a global mass migration event could be the result of U.S. policies; however, there is now compelling evidence that because the federal government incentivized – rather than criminalized – illegal migration, crime and disorder have followed.

In calendar year 2021, there were more than 1.3 million apprehensions in Texas, which is 1 million more apprehensions than what occurred in 2014. And, in calendar year 2022 there were more than 1.4 million apprehensions in Texas. These numbers do not include the many known and unknown *got-a-ways*.

In our profession it is the absence of crime and disorder that defines success, and the border crisis has increased the difficulty of doing so in every community throughout the state and nation.

In Texas, Governor Greg Abbott and our state legislature care deeply about protecting its people and have appropriated billions of dollars in state funds to support the mission of the U.S. Border Patrol and its Agents. To continue addressing the border crisis in full force, Governor Abbott has made border security an emergency item for the legislative session occurring in Austin right now. The Governor is working with members of the legislature to:

- Secure \$4.6 billion to bolster border security efforts
- Pass legislation making it at least a ten-year mandatory minimum jail sentence for anyone caught smuggling in Texas
- Enhance the minimum penalty for operating stash houses to a third degree felony
- Enhance criminal penalties for foreign terrorist organizations and increase intelligence operations against such organizations.

Nobody has done more to secure the southern border with Mexico than Governor Abbott. His leadership on this issue should be your example. Texas is a law-and-order state and the people of Texas overwhelming support the U.S. Military, law enforcement and the rule of law and they want meaningful action, not excuses. The state of Texas does not need the permission of the federal government to protect its citizens from transnational threats and it will continue to do so by working closely with our local and federal partners to address the ongoing border crisis.

In March 2021, Governor Abbott launched Operation Lone Star (OLS) to deter, detect and interdict transnational criminal activity using all available state resources as part of a fully integrated, multidisciplinary strategy to address security lapses at the border. Thousands of National Guard Soldiers, Texas State Troopers, DPS Special Agents, Texas Rangers, DPS Tactical Teams and Texas Game Warden personnel were deployed to the border region to conduct around-the-clock patrol operations on the river, in the brush, on the roadways and in the air in smuggling corridors.

Importantly, Texas Border Sheriffs and Chiefs of Police serve on the front line in protecting their communities and OLS provided them much needed funding to address the border crisis in their communities.

Infrastructure and technology are also vital to securing something as vast and diverse as the Texas/Mexico border. Governor Abbott enlisted the Texas Facilities Commission to continue work on a permanent wall at identified hot spots. These projects are complex and implementing them takes time. In the interim, the Texas National Guard has worked with Texas landowners and communities along the border to install temporary fencing to deter crossings on private property.

The temporary fencing (such as cyclone fencing), concertina wire or Conex boxes also serve as notice that those who cross over these barriers are subject to state criminal trespassing charges.

Governor Abbott designated the Mexican Cartels as Terrorist Organizations and directed that DPS Special Agents and Analysts conduct stateside criminal enterprise investigations targeting the command-and-control elements of the Mexican Cartels operating throughout Texas working closely with DEA, FBI and HSI in cities throughout Texas.

Another key element of the OLS strategy includes Texas' Anti-Gang Center Program that funds centers located throughout the state where there is a prevalence of gang activity. The Mexican Cartels work closely with these gangs that support cartel smuggling and trafficking operations and the gangs are also involved in the retail distribution of the drugs. The TAG Centers provide a venue to collocate local, state and federal gang enforcement, analytical, investigative and prosecutorial resources to maximize the impact on violent gang activity and dismantle gang networks working with the Mexican Cartels.

Other state agencies also play a key role such as the Texas Department of Criminal Justice which has provided jail space and transportation to address the many OLS related arrests. The Texas Department of Emergency Management continues to provide valuable support to local and state agencies as well.

I am submitting for today's record a table which contains some of the OLS activity numbers. Of note is the over 360 million lethal doses of fentanyl that were seized by DPS and more than 19 tons of methamphetamine. Moreover, members of the Texas National Guard, Texas Game Wardens and DPS personnel have detained and turned over 350,000 illegal migrants to Border Patrol that would have otherwise been *got-a-ways*.

Again, thank you for taking the time to travel to the Texas/Mexico border to witness the crisis for yourself and speaking with local experts and citizens who live and work here. This is a beautiful part of our state, or rather our country. The federal government owes it to the people who live here to do their job and secure the border. These communities and our state is doing everything possible to maintain the rule of law, protect human life, and protect property. All of this comes at great expense and sacrifice.





TESTIMONY OF

Raul L. Ortiz  
Chief  
U.S. Border Patrol  
U.S. Customs and Border Protection  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

For a Hearing

BEFORE

U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Homeland Security

ON

“Failure By Design: Examining Secretary Mayorkas’ Border Crisis”

March 15, 2023  
McAllen, TX

## **Introduction**

Chairman Green, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the U.S. Border Patrol's (USBP) critical operations at the Southwest Border. I am honored to appear today and represent the dedicated and talented men and women of USBP. As an operational component of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), USBP is committed to enforcing the nation's laws, protecting our national security, keeping dangerous drugs and people from crossing our borders, and providing safe and humane conditions for those in our custody.

Since 1924, USBP has been entrusted with protecting the American people and promoting economic prosperity through our border and national security mission. Despite the myriad threats that we have confronted throughout our history, including smuggling, irregular migration, and terrorism, we continually learn, evolve, and mature to ensure excellence in protecting the homeland with professionalism while maintaining public trust.

### ***Current State of the Border***

Evolving global and regional events continue to produce challenging conditions and trends along the Southwest Border that directly affect USBP's border security operations. Most notably, we continue to respond to elevated levels of migrant encounters and adapt to changing migrant demographics, while also addressing the ongoing and dynamic threat of transnational criminal organizations (TCOs).

Historically, most migrants USBP encountered were from Mexico and northern Central America. However, dynamic conditions along the Southwest Border indicate a changing demographic, one in which individuals and family units are migrating from countries much farther away. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, USBP encountered 2,214,652 migrants from 174 countries. In FY 2023 to date,<sup>1</sup> USBP encountered 770,175 migrants from 142 countries.

USBP is committed to the safe and humane processing of all encountered migrants while also preventing the entry of illegal drugs and dangerous persons. In FY 2022, USBP intercepted and seized 111,737 pounds of illegal drugs, including 18,348 pounds of methamphetamine, 12,469 pounds of cocaine, and 2,207 pounds of fentanyl.<sup>2</sup> USBP also encountered 12,028 subjects who had records of criminal histories, including 62 with homicide or manslaughter convictions and 365 with sexual offense convictions. We have ensured, and continue to ensure, that before any individual is released from USBP custody, he or she is vetted and screened and is determined not to pose a public safety or national security risk.

Increased numbers of migrants in USBP custody, combined with migrant demographics that make it more difficult to remove them from the United States due to complicated diplomatic relations with the country of removal, have led to logistical and operational challenges, especially concerning capacity constraints and care of migrants in processing facilities. However, USBP continues to work with our partners to help ensure efficient processing of all migrants in our custody.

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<sup>1</sup> As of January 31, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/drug-seizure-statistics>.

While irregular migration levels have remained elevated for several years, there has been a marked decrease since the announcement of new border enforcement measures in January 2023.

Following the January 5, 2023, implementation of the new parole processes for nationals of Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and expansion of the process for Venezuelans announced in October 2022, overall encounters of migrants at the Southwest border declined. USBP encounters of individuals who entered the country between ports of entry at the Southwest Border in January 2023 totaled 128,410, down 42 percent from 221,675 in December 2022. This is the lowest monthly amount of USBP encounters since February 2021, when encounters began to increase following the severe impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on migration. Encounters have remained at similarly low levels in February.

USBP's ability to manage migrant flow has vastly improved through investments in personnel, facilities, processing efficiencies, and technological improvements. USBP also draws on past experience with migrant surges and other challenges as it plans for and adapts to emerging conditions to ensure we can remain focused on our border security mission.

## **Improving Processing Capabilities**

Once the Title 42 public health order ultimately ends, USBP will continue to use its full range of immigration authorities under Title 8 of the U.S. Code to process migrants encountered at the border, as we have done throughout our agency's history. Under Title 8, noncitizens who enter the United States without authorization are placed into appropriate immigration proceedings, including expedited removal or proceedings before an immigration judge where they may make a claim for asylum or other protection.

USBP has accelerated ongoing efforts to improve processing operations by deploying additional non-uniformed support personnel; expanding capacity and improving conditions at processing facilities; investing in virtual and mobile processing technologies; and strengthening coordination with partner agencies and organizations. These initiatives expand USBP's capabilities and streamline operations to ensure the safe and humane processing of migrants while also relieving agents of non-enforcement duties.

### ***Increasing Non-Uniformed Support Personnel***

USBP deployed the first class of Border Patrol Processing Coordinators (BPPCs) in April 2021 to better meet the demands of processing noncitizens. BPPCs support Border Patrol agents with humanitarian care and intake processing of noncitizens and provide administrative and logistical support related to data entry and filing, personal property management, transportation, and welfare checks. These BPPCs have allowed agents to return to field work more quickly. To date, USBP has 961 BPPCs on board with more finalizing training and deployment. We have also expanded the use of contract personnel along the Southwest Border to include 429 contract security personnel for the Centralized Processing Centers (CPCs) and 565 contracted processors to handle data entry and management tasks; another 376 are pending deployment.

### ***Expanding Facilities and Services***

USBP continues to increase facility capacity and add short-term facilities at key border locations to reduce over-crowding and accommodate varying demographics of migrants encountered crossing the Southwest Border. CBP reopened the Rio Grande Valley CPC in McAllen, Texas, in March 2022 after extensive renovations which dramatically improved CBP's ability to process migrants encountered at the border in a safe, orderly, and humane manner.

Additionally, CBP announced the opening of a new soft-sided facility in El Paso, Texas, on January 11, 2023, which provides additional processing capacity for USBP's El Paso Sector. The facility is weatherproof, climate-controlled, and provides ample areas for eating, sleeping, and personal hygiene. Another soft-sided facility opened in the San Diego Sector on January 31. The new soft-sided facilities include wrap around service contracts that provide sanitation, janitorial, food, and medical services necessary to ensure appropriate conditions for migrants and USBP personnel.

The renovation of the McAllen CPC and opening of new soft-sided facilities are part of CBP's broader goal to safely process individuals CBP encounters, as well as increase capacity and improve facility conditions for migrants, agents, officers, and processing coordinators. We are also maximizing the use of air and ground transportation to move migrants from USBP Sectors that are over capacity to other less impacted CBP locations.

### ***Investing in Virtual and Mobile Processing Technologies***

Working with our partners, USBP is mobilizing and shifting personnel in anticipation of potential migration surges at the Southwest Border, providing resources to areas with the most need. USBP is also investing in virtual and mobile processing technologies that are making processing functions more efficient, allowing USBP to enlist the support of agents outside the Southwest Border region without requiring them to be physically present.

A key aspect of USBP's efforts to streamline processing operations is the Electronic Alien File (commonly referred to as an "A-File"). The initiative to make the A-File electronic will enable CBP, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to share and maintain a single file in a digital environment. USBP recently completed the first phase of its implementation of the end-to-end digital A-file for subjects processed for a Notice to Appear (NTA). Based on the success of the first phase, USBP is planning to continue implementation of the fully digital A-file for the NTA disposition nationwide in the coming months and to expand this capability to additional processes in the future. This transition will modernize USBP operations and lead to fully digital subject processing.

CBP will also increase access to, and promote use of, the Unified Immigration Portal (UIP), a centralized location where relevant immigration-related data from multiple agencies involved in the immigration process can be accessed. The platform delivers mission-critical information to users through dashboards, services, and data integration capabilities, facilitating expeditious processing of subjects and increasing visibility for interagency operations during surges.

### ***Coordinating with Partners***

Although a critical component, the USBP is only one part of the larger border security enterprise, and collaboration with our partners—foreign and domestic—multiplies the effectiveness of our border security. It is our responsibility to ensure we coordinate, as appropriate, operations with our partners to maximize their impact, while avoiding unnecessary disruptions or conflicts.

While the current border challenges are unprecedented in many ways, so too are the collaboration and joint efforts to address changing border conditions. USBP is a key component of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)-led strategy to ensure a comprehensive and deliberative response to current and emerging conditions along our Southwest Border. The strategy involves surging resources; increasing efficiency to reduce strain on the border; employing an aggressive consequence regime; coordinating with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in conjunction with state and local partners; targeting cartels and smugglers; and working with our regional partners. USBP is a key partner agency in DHS's Border Enforcement Security Task Force, which seeks to eliminate the barriers between federal and local investigations, close the gap with international partners in multinational criminal investigations, and create an environment that minimizes the vulnerabilities in our operations that TCOs have traditionally capitalized on to exploit our nation's land and sea borders. This comprehensive plan leverages a whole-of-government approach to prepare for and manage the current level and possible future increases in encounters of migrants at our Southwest Border.

USBP will continue to work with the DHS Southwest Border Coordination Center's Movement Coordination Cell (MCC), a standing interagency group charged with overseeing expedited processing and transfer of unaccompanied children and other vulnerable individuals out of CBP custody. The MCC, comprised of DHS personnel from CBP and ICE, as well as personnel from the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement, was formed to facilitate communication and problem-solving among U.S. government agencies to specifically address the flow of vulnerable populations. In addition, USBP appreciates critical ground and aviation support capabilities provided by the Department of Defense for detection and monitoring at the Southwest Border.

CBP is also communicating with various NGOs, including a range of non-profit organizations, faith-based entities, and others — both at and away from the border — regarding appropriate care and transportation of migrants released from custody. Furthermore, we continue to work closely with foreign governments to conduct joint enforcement operations.

### **Strengthening Border Enforcement**

In anticipation of increased migrant encounters, USBP is focused on ensuring other security measures and enforcement programs are not circumvented or compromised by the response to emerging events. USBP's deployment of resources and technology enables it to gain awareness of threats and swiftly adapt processes to changing situations along the border.

### ***Combating Human Smuggling***

USBP's posture and response to migration events are informed by comprehensive analyses of information and intelligence on operations of smugglers and the movement of migrants. We are

more effectively tracking movements of various migrant groups who may be headed towards the U.S. border and increasing investigation and prosecution of human smuggling networks responsible for unauthorized border crossings.

CBP launched Operation Sentinel, a new counter-network targeting operation focused directly on TCOs affiliated with smuggling migrants into the United States, in April 2021. More than 480 nonimmigrant visas and more than 300 Global Entry and SENTRI cards have been revoked since the launch of Operation Sentinel, and more than 20 businesses and associated entities have been targeted for suspension or debarment. Lookouts have been placed on 2,822 individuals associated with TCOs' illicit activity. More than 2,000 individuals involved in illicit money transactions have been identified and referred to interagency partners for law enforcement actions. Operation Sentinel refers all cases with potential prosecutorial interest to Federal and state investigative partners for review and prosecution.

Additionally, USBP supports the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ)-established Joint Task Force Alpha initiative, which counters TCOs affiliated with migrant smuggling by targeting their members and associates. DHS and its components are working with DOJ to leverage joint investigative, prosecutorial, and capacity-building efforts to investigate and prosecute the most prolific and dangerous human smuggling and human trafficking groups operating in Mexico and northern Central America.

Migrant smugglers put vulnerable individuals and families in danger every day. The Southwest Border region experiences dramatic and unpredictable temperature changes year-round, meaning individuals lost or left behind in desolate areas are at risk of drowning, dehydration, heat stroke, injuries, or death. During FY 2022, USBP agents rescued more than 22,075 individuals in a wide variety of circumstances. This critical work continues, and agents have conducted nearly 8,000 rescues already this fiscal year. CBP has increased the number of rescue beacons used on the Southwest Border and our CBP officers and agents continue to stand ready to provide lifesaving assistance to all who need it.

### ***Interdicting Illicit Drugs***

USBP remains focused on the TCOs that continue to expand across and beyond the Southwest and Northern Borders and increasingly demonstrate their ability to illicitly transport synthetic narcotics, including methamphetamine, illicitly manufactured fentanyl, and fentanyl analogues. Most illicit drugs, including fentanyl, enter the United States through our Southwest Border ports of entry in privately owned vehicles, commercial vehicles, and even by pedestrians.<sup>3</sup>

Between the ports of entry, CBP continues to experience high numbers of incidents involving illicit use of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), commonly referred to as "drones," to facilitate unlawful movement of people and narcotics across the southwest border. TCOs and possibly Foreign State Actors use UAS to conduct unauthorized surveillance of CBP personnel and operations to pass information to contacts on the ground on where to guide noncitizens or transport illegal drugs to circumvent law enforcement. Sensor records, pilot and agent sightings and other sources of information also indicate the increasing use of drones to transport illegal drugs and

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/drug-seizure-statistics>

other contraband across the border. This illicit activity threatens the safety of our frontline personnel, poses a collision risk to our aircraft, and adversely affects our border security operations.

TCOs continually adjust their criminal operations to circumvent law enforcement detection and interdiction by adjusting their tactics, techniques, and procedures in the smuggling of narcotics that can be transported in profitable quantities by advanced concealment techniques. Through intelligence gathering and analysis, advances in detection technology, counter network strategies, collaboration with other Federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, and interdictions, USBP adjusts law enforcement operations to combat TCO illicit activity and disrupt their operations.

### ***Leveraging Technology and Supporting Agents***

USBP relies on effective surveillance of suspect activity along the land borders as a critical element of CBP's border security operations. In FY 2022, USBP continued to deploy proven, effective surveillance technology, including aerostats, mobile surveillance capability systems, remote video surveillance systems, and integrated fixed towers tailored to specific operational requirements along the highest trafficked areas of the Southwest Border.

USBP is also expanding its use of Team Awareness Kits, a digital tool that greatly enhances coordination and collaboration among response teams. This innovative solution enables tactical data to be generated, visualized, and securely shared. The tool facilitates daily operations for public safety organizations and allows different organizations which do not regularly communicate to maintain shared tactical awareness.

Technology is often regarded as a force multiplier, but it is meaningless without dedicated and skilled personnel to operate it. The men and women of USBP are our greatest asset, and their work is extremely demanding, both physically and emotionally. When planning and implementing any operational change or technological deployment, we assess and prioritize every opportunity to enhance the preparedness, safety, and well-being of the USBP workforce.

### ***Enhancing Resiliency***

CBP lost 11 colleagues to suicide in calendar year 2021, 15 colleagues in 2022, and two in 2023. One is too many. It was a tough year for the well-being of our agents. We need to continue investing in programs that provide direct support and communicate critical information to our workforce and their families, while improving our operational capabilities to allow agents to focus on their primary mission. Additionally, we, as an agency, need to work to identify the root causes of why we are seeing suicides at the current rate.

USBP recently began the Be the One campaign as a call for action to bring suicidal ideation to the forefront. We need to check in on each other, not just at work, but in life, and talk to and engage with one another in meaningful ways. We work long hours away from our families, so we need to take care of one another.

CBP leadership has directed that every CBP employee receive in-person suicide prevention training in 2023. CBP's Office of Training and Development, in partnership with the CBP

Workforce & Resiliency Directorate and Dr. Kent Corso, developed a three-day train-the-trainer course that started in January as part of the effort to reach all hands.

USBP has also directed that every employee completes a two-day Basic Resiliency Skills Course by the end of calendar year 2023.

### ***Conclusion***

Although the continued elevated levels of migration over the last several years have presented many challenges, they have also led USBP to evolve, adapt, increase efficiency, and invest in our processing enterprise and technology. These investments, together with the resiliency, dedication, and professionalism of the men and women of USBP, enable USBP's continued mission success of securing our border and keeping the American people safe while providing proper care to those in our custody.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions.